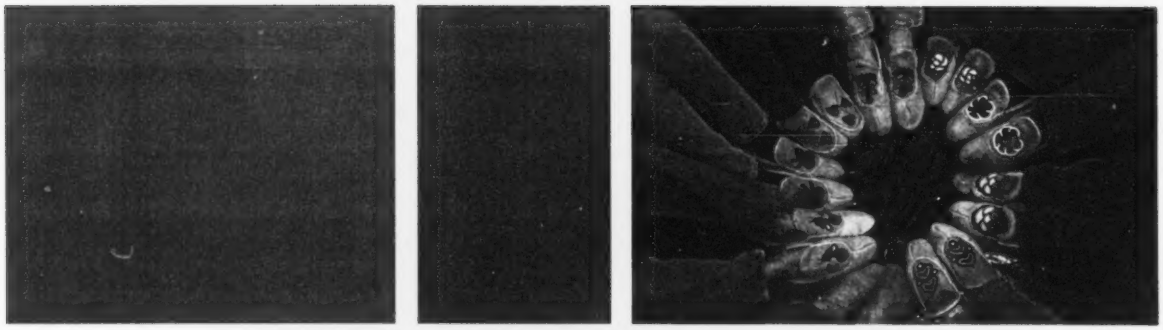

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ALBERTA, FEDS, ABORIGINAL LEADERS WORK TO NARROW EDUCATION GAP

A key goal of Alberta's Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky is narrowing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Partnership Council, announced in October by Zwozdesky, Alberta Education Minister Dave Hancock, Advanced Education and Technology Minister Doug Horner and provincial leaders of First Nations and Métis, is the latest strategy designed to help meet that goal.

Membership includes Hancock; Horner; Zwozdesky; the Grand Chiefs of Treaties 6, 7 and 8; and the Presidents of the Métis Nation of Alberta and Métis Settlements General Council.

"The FNMI Education Partnership Council fully supports our education and cultural goals of improving and achieving higher educational success for all First Nation learners," said Treaty 7 Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead.

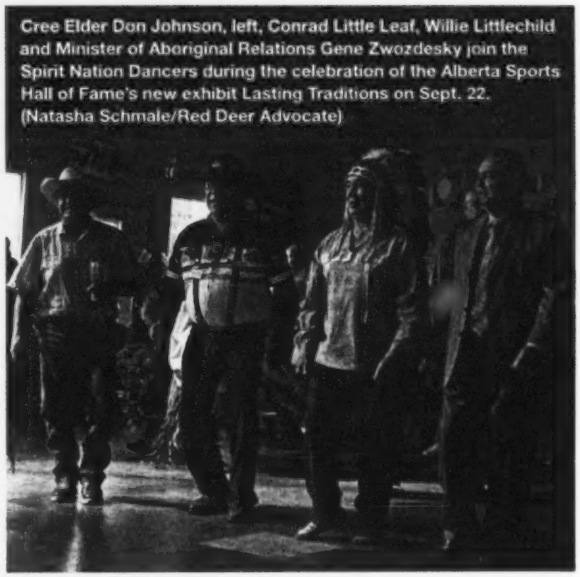
Issues include the need to focus on early learning opportunities; the education funding gap between on-reserve students and those living off-reserve; limited participation of FNMI students in post-secondary education; and the shortage of quality school infrastructure on reserves. Participants also underlined the need to ensure that curricula reflect Aboriginal perspectives.

"We look forward to working with the FNMI Partnership Council," said Gerald Cunningham, President of the Métis Settlements General Council. "This is a positive direction that will support our strategies in improving education initiatives and goals for our Métis learners."

The ministers and the Aboriginal leaders have invited eight community representatives with experience in Aboriginal education to participate on the council. They will complement the work already being done in FNMI education in Alberta.

"First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth must have access to all the opportunities available to other Albertans," said Hancock. "We will strive to close the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners."

For more information on the FNMI Education Partnership Council, visit **www.education.alberta.ca.**



Cree Elder Don Johnson, left, Conrad Little Leaf, Willie Littlechild and Minister of Aboriginal Relations Gene Zwozdesky join the Spirit Nation Dancers during the celebration of the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame's new exhibit Lasting Traditions on Sept. 22. (Natasha Schmale/Red Deer Advocate)

Government of Alberta ■

SAFER COMMUNITIES THE GOAL OF ANTI-VIOLENCE PILOT PROJECTS

Albertans deserve to be safe in their communities and for the past two years Alberta's Safe Communities Initiative (SafeCom) has worked with local leaders and agencies to develop crime prevention strategies and long-term solutions that address the cause and effects of crime.

SafeCom, a partnership of nine government ministries, police, community groups, municipalities, businesses and social agencies, is the Government of Alberta's response to the report of the Safe Communities Task Force.

"We want our youth to know that real people can enjoy life without drugs, alcohol and other substances."
- Pam Heavy Head

"There are no easy solutions to the complex issues associated with reducing crime and preserving the safety of our communities," said Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky. "However, co-operation, community innovation and our commitment can improve the safety of Alberta communities."

For example, reducing the potential for harm and increasing scholastic achievement among Blood Tribe teenagers is the goal of a $1.1 million, three-year SafeCom pilot project. This initiative will address risk factors such as alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse that harm families and can lead to violence and other criminal behaviour.

"The pilot project focuses on protective factors – including the Blackfoot culture – that will allow young people in high school to discover their own strengths, resilience and leadership skills," said Zwozdesky.

The program is being customized to meet the needs of Blood youth by providing access to cultural resources including Elders, addictions counselling, victim services and police services. It aims to involve up to 100 teens and their families each year.

"Our Elders speak of real people – people who possess knowledge of their history, language and culture," said Pam Heavy Head, a Blood Tribe member and project manager with the Canadian Red Cross Society, which is delivering the initiative.

"We want our youth to know real people can enjoy life without drugs, alcohol and other substances that harm not only themselves but their families and community as well."

ABORIGINAL LEADERS MEET WITH FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, TERRITORIAL MINISTERS

Gene Zwozdesky, Alberta's Minister of Aboriginal Relations, joined his colleagues and Aboriginal leaders from across Canada at a meeting in Toronto where they outlined priority areas to work on together to improve conditions for all Aboriginal peoples. The Oct. 29 meeting focused on a broad range of issues facing First Nation, Métis and Inuit people in Canada.

Ministers and leaders confirmed that establishing an *Aboriginal Affairs Working Group* is critical to improving socio-economic conditions for all Aboriginal peoples.

They chose two priority areas to be dealt with by the working group – education and skills training; and economic development.

Creation of the working group fulfils a commitment by Canada's premiers last summer in Regina to the five national Aboriginal organization leaders. The working group supported a call by the premiers for a First Ministers' meeting on Aboriginal issues and committed to report its recommendation to them before the next Council of the Federation meeting in August 2010.

Federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs met with leaders of the national Aboriginal organizations in Toronto on Oct. 29. Front (from left): Darrell Dexter, Premier of Nova Scotia; Clément Chartier, Metis National Council; Carolyn Bertram, Prince Edward Island; Jeanette Corbiere-Laval, Native Women's Association of Canada; Shawn Atleo, Assembly of First Nations; Brad Duguid, Ontario; Chuck Strahl, Canada; Betty Ann Lavallée, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples; Patty Pottle, Newfoundland and Labrador. Back row (from left): Louis Tapardjuk, Nunavut; Gene Zwozdesky, Alberta; Eric Robinson, Manitoba; Floyd Roland, Premier of Northwest Territories; Pierre Corbeil, Quebec; Rick Brewer, New Brunswick; George Abbott, British Columbia; Mary Simon, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

PARTNERSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Alberta is home to one of the largest, youngest and fastest-growing Aboriginal populations in the country. Strong, vibrant Aboriginal communities are an essential part of the economic future of Alberta and Canada.

The First Nations Economic Partnerships Initiative (FNEPI), administered by the ministries of Aboriginal Relations and Employment and Immigration, continues to be the cornerstone of Alberta's $8 million commitment in 2009-10 to encourage Aboriginal partnerships, strengthen economic capacity and provide entrepreneurial support.

Since 2005, FNEPI has supported 54 strategic economic partnerships with First Nations and Tribal Councils. The program has also supported 35 capacity building projects and the hiring of more than 50 Regional Economic Partnership Co-ordinators across the province.

"Through FNEPI we are forging new, innovative connections with Aboriginal entrepreneurs, businesses and communities," said Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Aboriginal Relations. "Economic partnerships are opening doors to prosperity for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Alberta."

The Aboriginal Internship Program for Land Stewardship is one of the latest FNEPI success stories. This program develops qualified Aboriginal people from communities across Alberta to participate in sustainable land and resource management.

Support from FNEPI's Strategic Economic Initiatives program helped launch the pilot project. In 2005, the Alberta Research Council, with collaboration from government, industry and First Nations partners, launched a full-scale internship program.

From left: Marsha HeavyHead, Blood First Nation; Dennis Louis, Montana First Nation; Carole Crowe, instructor Aboriginal Internship Program; Lawrence Lamouche, Woodland Cree First Nation; Cory Fitzpatrick, Fort McKay First Nation; Marc Lavassier, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation; April Daychief, Sunchild First Nation. Missing: Shirley Delorme, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation.

Seven interns from six communities are expected to graduate in April 2010 and return to their communities as resource management experts.

The *Aboriginal Economic Partnerships Annual Results 2008-09* report has been published (December 2009). Visit www.aboriginal.alberta.ca for report details, success stories, best practices, videos and an online toolkit of Aboriginal economic development resources.

CONFERENCE OUTLINES HOW STATS CAN HELP BUILD ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Statistical information can be used to build vibrant, sustainable Aboriginal communities in the western provinces and northern territories, delegates to Aboriginal Strategies 2009 in early November were told.

The three-day Statistics Canada conference in Edmonton, sponsored in part by Alberta's Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, showcased successful strategies for sharing knowledge, experiences, best practices and challenges in five key areas: children, families and youth; economic development and labour market; health and well-being; the North; and Canada's growing urban Aboriginal population.

"There is still much work to be done in the areas of Aboriginal education, housing and health care, among others," Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky told the assembled statisticians, Aboriginal community leaders and local policy makers.

"Thanks to your good work, we have demographic measures to track our progress in these areas. Your data, analysis and growth projections are guiding our future focus, informing policy and evaluating our programs."

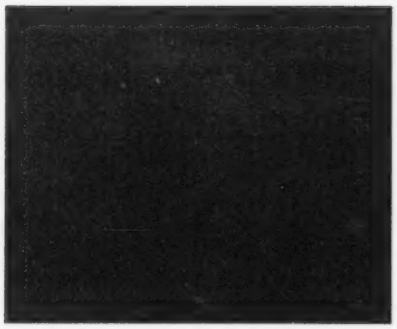
Other high-profile speakers included Anil Arora, Assistant Chief Statistician at StatsCan and Pamela McCurry, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Their topics ranged from urbanization of the Aboriginal population in Alberta to Aboriginal communications technology to comprehensive community planning as a guide for treaty making in British Columbia.

> **"The conference will serve to provide a better understanding of the quality of life for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people,"**
> **- Hamblin Beharry**

"The conference featured a diverse range of topics reflecting the complexity of Aboriginal communities and will serve to provide a better understanding of the quality of life for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people," said Hamblin Beharry, Aboriginal Relations' Manager of Statistics and Research.

In addition to learning about how data are being used, delegate Cindy Tom-Lindley said she found the Aboriginal contacts she made at the conference to be just as valuable as the nearly 40 breakout sessions and speakers.

"We all need to get over the lack of trust, because we need to know about the past in order to move into the future, in order to make changes," she said.



MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER: FALL SITTING OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The fall sitting of the Alberta Legislature wrapped up Thursday, Nov. 26, after a busy session dominated by discussions of the H1N1 flu epidemic and one of the largest vaccination programs in the province's history.

I'm pleased to say that, despite some early hiccups, the mass inoculations went well across Alberta. That was particularly true on First Nations reserves and Métis Settlements. I believe this was due not only to effective planning by all levels of governments, but also to the experience Aboriginal communities have in organizing and managing events for large numbers of people.

While the federal government had primary responsibility for the on-reserve clinics, the Government of Alberta including the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, participated on the Alberta Health Services Aboriginal Communities Pandemic Influenza Planning Committee. Their job was to identify risks management strategies for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and communities in Alberta and to co-ordinate the roles and responsibilities of the appropriate governments and agencies during the pandemic response.

We dealt with a number of other issues as well, including taking steps to make our communities a safer place. During the past few months, the nine ministries – including Aboriginal Relations – that are working on the Safer Communities Initiative have worked diligently to raise awareness, promote prevention and support victims.

A number of those initiatives focused on Aboriginal communities including The Red Path Living Without Violence Program that provides community-based treatment for individuals who have been convicted of domestic assault. Red Path is based in the First

Nation communities of Alexis and Alexander and is delivered by the Yellowhead Tribal Community Corrections Society and their partners.

Economic issues remain a priority for the Government of Alberta and we have a plan for a strong economic recovery. Our province will return to surplus in three years. We have a four point plan — limit government spending; use cash reserves to cushion the revenue shortfall; continue to invest in public infrastructure; and ensure that Alberta's industries remain competitive and attractive to investors. When the economy rebounds, Alberta will be prepared and ready.

More information on the Fall sitting including the Hansard record of debates can be found on the Legislative Assembly website at **www.assembly.ab.ca**.

As we move into the holiday season, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Iitaaohmkatoiksistsko! Miyo-manitowi-kîsikâw isi!

- Hon. Gene Zwozdesky

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